



**GREAT DENHAM PARISH COUNCIL**

**Minutes of the public meeting of held on 8<sup>th</sup> September 2014 at 7.30pm in Great Denham Primary School, Greenkeepers Road, Great Denham, MK40 4GG**

**Present: Parish Councillors**

Jim Weir (JW) - Chair, Kevin Cawood (KC), Alan Davis (AD), Tony Harrison (TH), Paul Stonebridge (PS)

**Borough Councillor**

Mark Smith (MS)

**Parish Clerk**

Roz Buchanan (RB)

**In Attendance**

45 members of the public

**Action**

**Introduction**

JW thanked everyone for coming and explained the format of the evening would be the public meeting, followed by the normal parish council (PC) meeting which everyone was welcome to stay for.

**1. Introduction and current position regarding S106 modifications put forward by David Wilson Homes Ltd.**

JW explained the background to the situation the parish faces and a copy of his Introduction and Opening Statement is attached. He explained that on 28<sup>th</sup> August the PC had met with representatives of DWH, Bedford Borough Council's (BBC) head of planning and representatives of the other parishes affected (Kempston Rural and Kempston Town). JW set out the proposals made by David Wilson Homes Ltd. (DWH) and the counter proposals made by the PC in respect of each item covered by the S106 Agreement. A copy of the resulting Options paper is attached. JW invited questions and comments from those present and these are set out below:-

**Can the service charge in respect of the Country Park be explained?**

The charge is an annual maintenance fee paid by all homeowners in the new development, but not paid by those in the original 250 houses. This type of charge is becoming increasingly common on all new developments.

**If a saving of £1.4m is to be made there is a concern that the service provided will be lower and that the service charge will increase despite the promises that it will not.**

The savings proposed by DWH in the Country Park will be made by such methods as changes to the finishes of paths and the types of trees planted. It is a matter of public record that the service charge will only increase in line with inflation and not in order to cover the savings proposed.

**DWH can appeal against a refusal by the Planning Committee and it is understood that such an appeal is likely to succeed. Is there any point in opposing their proposals?**

Yes. It is important to have the community voice heard.

During negotiations on 28<sup>th</sup> August the PC proposed that DWH look at providing less social housing, as every 1% less spent on this provided a saving of £500K which could be spent on facilities in the community. Social housing in Great Denham will be an average of 22% under the new proposals compared with 14% across the Borough. The PC is also hoping to persuade BBC not to provide the new bridge but to plough the money into the community and refurbish the existing bridge.

The PC had also persuaded DWH to reconsider the provision of a second storey on the community hall which will provide increased opportunities for its use.

**Could DWH be persuaded to provide more by poor publicity in the press?**

The PC will not go to the press and, although individuals were free to act as they wished, JW warned against the negative impact this could have on potential buyers.

**What is the proposed timescale for implementing the S106 obligations?**

All of the trigger points for providing the facilities are listed on the PC website and all of them have been missed by DWH.

**Will the delays continue?**

DWH want to get their proposals agreed at the next Planning Committee meeting on 22<sup>nd</sup> September. It is unknown if this deadline will be met but nothing can happen until then.

**When were the costings relating to the profitability of the site decided?**

JW confirmed he had challenged these figures and also the land values. BBC had employed independent consultants (CBRE) to check the case presented by DWH and they had confirmed the validity of their claim.

**Would DWH not make more profit if they delivered on the facilities?**

Unfortunately DWH did not agree with this and neither, it seems, does BBC who are relying on their consultants' findings. JW said he knew people had bought on the premise that there would be certain facilities and whilst DWH are making a profit nationally, they rely on the fact this particular site is not, and the relevant legislation allows them to do so.

**What can the residents do to support the PC and the community?**

Social media can be used to raise the profile of the issues being facing and to galvanise the community to act. Residents should also write to the Planning Department and members of the Planning Committee expressing their dissatisfaction.

**Build quality is perceived as poor with snagging not being resolved. In March 2013 DWH stated in writing they will only be providing such things as sash windows in feature homes and also reducing the number of houses with solar panels. There is a concern this will lead to a two tier development.**

Issues concerning build quality need to be addressed directly with DWH and the PC will support householders in this. Residents should also write to BBC with their concerns. JW said that in 2007 DWH had agreed to build to the then current building standards plus 10%. They now say they will build to current standards. JW said he has been assured by BBC planning department that as current standards are greater in 2014 than anything provided by DWH in 2007 there will be no lowering of build standards.

**What uses are proposed for the second floor of the community hall?**

The community hall was initially to be a single storey building. Due to cuts the library was not considered viable as a separate building by BBC and the planners suggested it be housed in a second storey of the community hall. Planning permission has been granted for this. However DWH said they could not afford to fit it out as a library and wanted to return to a single storey building. At the meeting on 28<sup>th</sup> August the PC had made it clear it did not need to be fitted out and DWH are reconsidering whether they can go ahead with a two storey building. The PC sees this second floor as an opportunity to provide increased facilities and options for Great Denham. If that opportunity is not taken it will be lost forever.

There are good examples of successful, vibrant community halls which Great Denham could model itself upon e.g. Brickhill and also Project 229 in Kempston. The PC have done a 10 year, fully costed, business plan which has been approved by both BBC and DWH.

**How long before the hall will be available?**

If agreement is reached on 22<sup>nd</sup> September by the Planning Committee it could be ready by summer 2015. However, there are no guarantees given the promises made in the past.

**Who will manage the hall?**

Neither BBC nor DWH want to run the hall. As stated above the PC have submitted a business plan. It proposes that the hall be run by a charity with trustees elected from within the community. A member of the PC would also be a trustee.

**DWH are allowed to bring in a third party to manage the hall. Is it likely they will do so in order to further save costs?**

DWH must make a “parachute payment” to whoever takes on the management of the hall and so there will be no cost saving by allowing a third party to take it on.

**Is there anything else in the S106 agreement which DWH could try and renegotiate in the future?**

No.

**What is the timescale within which the Commuted Sum must be used?**

November 2016. The PC will request an extension of time within which to use this sum if necessary.

**Can the community challenge the findings of BBC consultants by employing our own consultants?**

Yes, but this would be costly and the best way forward is to lobby as suggested above. It is possible to trigger a debate within BBC by getting 30 signatures on a petition. If there is sufficient pressure ahead of the Planning Committee meeting at which DWHs’ application is considered, then it might make them reconsider.

There were no more questions. JW advised the PC were awaiting DWH’s response which was expected before the Planning Committee next meet on 22<sup>nd</sup> and would keep everyone informed.

**All PCs**

**2. BBC Local Plan and “Call for Sites”**

BBC has started work on a new Local Plan, part of which will address housing development to 2032. Those who have land which they believe is suitable for development have been invited to submit details in the “Call for Sites”. This does not mean these sites will be included in the Plan. As part of their agreement with the landowner (Wingfield Estate), DWH must promote any land which could be available for housing to be used as such. In 2013 BBC turned down an application to use the land still owned by the Wingfield Estate, known as “the excluded land”, for 300 houses. The Estate’s agents (Bidwells) are now proposing four sites within Great Denham.

- a) 350 houses on the excluded land – this would push the playing fields further into the flood plain and reduce the Country Park by approximately 16 acres.
- b) 127 houses on land east and west of Mercia Road – these two sites were previously to be used for the lower and middle schools until a single primary school was provided.
- c) 55 houses on land adjacent to Vicars Close which BBC have identified as being in Biddenham but is in fact in Great Denham

There is also an application to include a site next to the Box End Water Park which would affect Great Denham.

The PC will be vigorously opposing all of these sites using the arguments it successfully used last time about flood, open spaces and infrastructure. Bidwells did not appeal the previous decision and in the view of MS the Borough has no appetite to accept the excluded land.

The PC has been invited to comment on the proposals by 15<sup>th</sup> September in advance of the formal public consultation. However, all the information is publicly available on the Borough’s website and the PC encouraged everyone to write to BBC. A template will be made available on the PC’s website for use in writing to BBC.

**RB**

**3. Updates**

**a) Shop**

JW confirmed that the shop would be a Sainsburys Local and that the legal agreements were signed today. He had met with DWH and Sainsburys and displayed some drawings of the proposed building which should be ready by summer 2015. There will be an additional three retail units available to anyone interested.

He also displayed a drawing of the district centre as now proposed by DWH and noted

that the care home was still there. The meeting place, comprising two benches in the car park, was unacceptable and DWH has promised to revise this to create a more meaningful meeting place.

**b) Broadband**

A contract has been signed between DWH and BT to upgrade cabinets 126 and 127 and to provide a new cabinet, 141, two thirds of the way along Greenkeepers Road. These will go live by 15<sup>th</sup> March 2015 and when cabinet 141 goes live it will free up capacity in 126/127 to help the new Bovis houses. DWH are funding this. There is still no solution for the original 250 houses but the existing unused trunking could be utilised. Colin Brookes of BT is meeting with the board on 9<sup>th</sup> September and will be recommending a privately funded option. If, as expected, the board agrees he will meet with the PC in November to discuss funding.

**c) Bus**

JW asked if there was any appetite for the bus service to call at the railway station despite the fact it already stopped at the bridge on Old Ford End Road, meaning a 4.5 minute walk to the station. There was general agreement that there was, especially when it is dark and/or wet.

The following issues were raised by those present:

- I. Those using the service to reach the bus station would not be pleased to have additional time added to their journey
- II. The service may still not be used well as the bus meanders around Queens Park before reaching the station which may put commuters off.
- III. An express peak time service may be a better idea.

The latter seemed popular and JW will follow it up.

**JW**

**Any other business**

A member of the public asked when the double yellow lines would be finished around the school. JW said the traffic order was in place and, whilst BBC had hoped to get the work completed before the new term, there had been some delays. The work is expected to be done in the next few weeks.

Penny Fletcher of the Labour Party introduced herself. The PC said it must remain politically neutral but was happy for Ms Fletcher to make a short address to those present. She said she was the Labour mayoral candidate and would be happy for anyone to contact her for help on any issue.

JW thanked everyone for their time and invited everyone to remain for the PC meeting. The meeting closed at 9.15pm.